in Africa, also allow play for the esthetic impulse, have been lost as well. Ironworking is absent not only because the necessary deposits of iron ore are lacking, but because the technique of shaping the metal into various forms, which in Africa is in the hands of specialists, was apparently suppressed in the time of slavery. No native cloth is woven. Basketry has survived, but wherein in Africa designs of no small artistic merit are achieved in this medium, it is markedly utilitarian in Haiti. Even from a technical point of view, the basketry forms are of the simplest, the panniers used for transportation of products on mule-back being merely an in-and-out weave, and the plaited strips of which hats and the *manouite*, or carrying basket, are made are of a parallel simplicity.

Few African recreational forms have survived. *Wari*, the draughts-like West African game found today in many parts of the West Indies, is unknown in the interior of Haiti, though it has been introduced into Port-au-Prince, where it is played by longshoremen who have learned it from the sailors of near-by islands. String figures, important in West Africa, are not encountered, and no children's pursuits comparable to the play of young Africans were seen in Mirebalais, if the minor ceremony of marking the loss of childhood teeth be excepted. African types of recreation have in the main given way to cock-fights and card-games, both of which derive their interest from the opportunities they offer for gambling—a fact important in itself, since gambling is not one of the widespread African vices. The most important card-games are *trois-sept*, *mariage*, and *bezique*, and both men and women know them and play them for stakes. Similarly cock-fighting, particularly during the dry season, is a passionate avocation of the men. Large sums are wagered on the results of an encounter, and feeling often runs high.*

The Haitian genius for art and recreation is best embodied in the dance and its accompanying songs and drum rhythms. Virtuosity is attained not only by the dancers, but even more

with the purely Catholic rituals carried on at the village church, are seen to hold an important if unofficial place in the complex of rites known in the Haitian Church calendar as the Fête of Saint d'Eau.

During the two or three days preceding the fête and on the fifteenth of July itself, an air of great gayety not unlike the carnival spirit accompanying European Church festivals pervades the surrounding country. Canions traverse the almost impassable side road, bringing crowds of people from Port-au-Prince, from the Dominican border, and even from the north, who throng the streets and the shrines and tramp the miles from the village to the waterfalls or visit the newer sacred sites of St. John's Wood and En bas Palmes, to light candles and ask the satisfaction of their needs. Like the falls themselves, these spots by their very beauty awaken a sense of emotional awareness, and it is not strange that here, as at the falls, many possessions occur. At night, in particular, the great trees with their interlacing serpent-like vines, the gaping earth which at En bas Palmes is witness to the uprooting of the palm trees where the miracle occurred, and the stream of sacred water, all make a scene of indescribable eeriness, heightened by the flickering candles given as offerings, and the open lamps of those who stay the night here to fulfill their vows.

In the town itself gambling and other games go on, and dances of all kinds are held at night, among them *vodun* and *bal*, though at these public dances no possessions are commenced. One of the most colorful aspects of the scene is the *penitents*, wearing clothing of varied colors in fulfillment of a request by the *loa* they worship or an obligation to them. Such folk are not permitted in church unless the clothing which marks them is covered by ordinary dress, but they walk the streets, often possessed and often using their power to heal those whom they encounter. Possessions by Ogun, by Gede, by Baron Samedi, by Damballa, by Ezilie and other vodun deities were observed, particularly at the shrines, where their devotees prayed and healed the sick.

of whom are sincere practicing voodooists as they are sincere practicing Catholics, who do not put an end to the worship of false gods.

The absence of graphic and plastic arts in Haitian culture, commented upon in a preceding chapter, must also be regarded as a case in point in laying bare the anatomy of this inner conflict of traditions, since it is important to recognize that the suppression of these forms of the prevalent African cultures would seem to have lost to the Haitian an important outlet for the translation of inner tensions caused by pent-up drives. Even more revealing is the substitution of games of chance for those games of skill which in most African and New World Negro societies are played for their own sake alone—that is, for the prestige accruing to the skillful player. The strain that accompanies this play for stakes, often of no inconsiderable value in terms of the resources of the players, is patent to the most casual observer. The question here arises whether or not the craving for excitement of this kind may not in Haiti be traceable to the inhibition, under slavery, of some of the more gracious forms of African life which there make for social equilibrium. Might it not represent a kind of compensation for the thwarted psychic ease with which a culturally undisturbed people approach their own existence—a state of being which, in contrast, is quite lacking in Haiti?

A singularly illuminating comment upon these manifestations of instability in Haitian life has been made by Dr. J. C. Dorsainvil, who in drawing his conclusion called both upon his own medical training and on his experience of many years as a profound student of his own people. "It has perhaps been insufficiently remarked to what an astonishing degree the Haitian people live on their nerves."[1] As might be expected, he advances a number of possible explanations of the causes that underlie this state of "living on nerves." The wear and tear of life in the tropics is given as one reason; another is the excitement of the *vodun* dances with their frenzy of possession;

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1954) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

dropped, he picks up the contents of the next hole and continues the redistribution. Should his last piece eventually fall into an empty pocket, his turn is ended and his opponent begins. However, if his last piece falls into a hole containing one or two pieces, he "eats" those pieces along with the piece which he places there. He continues the play as before, starting with the following hole, monopolizing the play until he ends in an empty hole. The one who takes the most pieces wins. In some Haitian variants of the game, each person's play is limited to the distribution of the contents of a single hole.

THE GAME OF MAYAMBA

This game, like *caille*, appears to be of African origin. It is played with four chips made of shell, baked clay, or broken chinaware. One side of each chip is white, the other usually blue. Any number of players may participate, and, as in dice, all compete against the thrower. *Mayamba* has a strictly gambling incentive. If a player throws two whites and two blues, or four whites, or four blues, he wins. If he throws any odd combination he loses.

2: Courlander B-6 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

as *houngfor*, *houssi*, *houngbénon*, *houstor*, etc. *Mystère* is of obvious French origin. *Loa* is probably from the Bantu, but it could be from the Yoruba.

[2]Various methods and formulas are employed in "tying" a loa. Sometimes making the sign of the cross is regarded as adequate, or the saying of a prayer. In "The Vodun Service in Northern Haiti" (*American Anthropologist*, XLII, 242-243), George Eaton Simpson reports that the "tying" of a loa sometimes results in a contest between the individual concerned and his houngan. If the houngan wants the *mait' tête* to come in, he must neutralize the ritual barriers the "horse" has put in the way. "One procedure for bringing on possession in a servant who has tried to 'tie' his chief god is for the priest to stand in front of the person whom he suspects, make the sign of the cross, and strike him on the forehead three times with a sacrificial stone. Usually these blows are hard enough to make blood spurt. The servant then begs the pardon of the angry god, and as soon as possible he unties the knots in his handkerchief [the method he has used for 'tying' his loa]."

[3]Herskovits, *Dahomey*.

Chapter 41: *Death Rites* (*pp. 30-40*)

[1]Maurice Delafosse, *L'Ame nègre*. Translation from *Free France*, special issue No. 4, French Press and Information Service, New York, June, 1945.

[2]Leo A. Verwilghen, in booklet describing peoples of the Kwango region, accompanying *Music of the Western Congo*, recordings issued by the Ethnic Folkways Library.

[3]Willoughby, *The Soul of the Bantu*, pp. 88-89.

[4]W. M. Eiselen and I. Schapera, "Religious Beliefs and Practices," in Schapera, *The Bantu-speaking Tribes of South Africa*, p. 250.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haïti*, p. 212.

[6]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, pp. 213-214.

[7]Hall and others, *Haitian Creole*, American Anthropological Association, Memoir No. 54, pp. 188-189.

[8]Simpson, "Four Vodun Ceremonies," *Journal of American Folklore*, April-June, 1946, pp. 155-162.

[9]As translated by Courlander from Simpson's Creole text, *ibid.*, p. 156. The preceding paragraph is from p. 155.

[10]Translated by Courlander from the Creole of Simpson's text.

[11]This and the preceding paragraph are from Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[12]These shells, as indicated elsewhere, are part of the paraphernalia of the Vodoun priest and appear to be an inheritance from the priests of the Fa cult of Dahomey. The divining shells are usually thrown on the ground in fours, and the readings depend upon combinations of "heads and tails." The manner of throwing the shells, as well as the number used, corresponds closely with the Haitian secular gambling game *mayombe* (see Appendix 2), though the purpose is obviously different. In some priestly rites in Haiti, ashes rather than the customary shells are used for divining.

[13]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

[14]*Ibid.*, p. 161.

[15]Herskovits, *op. cit.*, p. 208.

[16]Herskovits (*ibid.*) notes that persons who die of smallpox, lightning, and certain other phenomena are not buried in coffins. Some of my informants indicated this to be their understanding also, but they said that the dead are buried without coffins for strictly economic reasons as well.

[17]Simpson, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

[18]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 156.

[19]Herskovits, *Dahomey*, I, 358.

[20]*Ibid.*, pp. 307-308.

[21]Herskovits, *Life in a Haitian Valley*, p. 214.

[22]Hall and others, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

3: Leyburn Z-4, 5 (no date) 1966
SV3 Haiti SV3

527 On Saturday nights one hears the drums beating all over the country, but if one follows the sound he is more than likely to end [534] up at nothing more esoteric than a neighborhood dance. Other [535] musical instruments than drums are rare, but any community has drums; and these set a rhythm to which one can dance. Generally food is available at these affairs, as well as drinks both hard and soft. 273 It is not extraordinary to discover that a few of the men have drunk rather freely of clairin, the raw rum of the country; most drunkenness seems to lead to good-natured ribaldry rather than to offensive violence. It is unusual for a drunken man to cause damage of any 535 serious nature. The dancing corresponds neither to American ballroom dancing nor to set folk dancing. Most of it is done solo, and an individual participates or remains on the outskirts of the enclosure as 533 the mood of the moment impels him. Over the beat of the drum can be heard one of the current songs, more than likely a bit smutty in nature, and frequently poking fun at some well-known personage, or making allusions which in normal speech might seem crude.

541 One of the popular Sunday afternoon sports is the *gaguère*, or cock-[525] fight, held under a shelter back of a home. Much small betting goes on. The spectators sit or stoop close around the dusty ring, talking to the cock they are backing, commenting on the fight, offering advice to the owner. Between rounds the cocks are rubbed down, sprayed with water or rum, fondled and excited anew. Toward the latter stages of any fight the spectacle becomes gory and, to the uninitiated, distinctly cruel.

526 There is singularly little sport in Haiti. Élite youths play tennis; boys enjoy football; and swimming is a common diversion. Few sports are competitive and, so far as the writer has observed, the peasants have in their games practically nothing resembling organization.